



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

HB 6187 An Act Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees

Elizabeth Cafarella, Director of Public Policy and Communication

Submitted to the Labor and Public Employees Committee

Public Hearing, February 24, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and members of the Committee, my name is Elizabeth Cafarella, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Communication at Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS).

CONNSACS is the statewide association of nine community-based rape crisis centers in Connecticut. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services.

CONNSACS submits this testimony in support of HB 6187 An Act Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees. We support this legislation because we feel strongly that victims of sexual assault should not have to risk losing their jobs to seek counseling at a sexual assault crisis center, to be present in court to request a restraining order, to attend criminal proceedings, or to receive ongoing medical care related to their assault. HB 6187 would provide essential protection to these victims so that they can take the steps they need to recover from the trauma of their assault while maintaining their employment.

Just like everyone else, victims of sexual assault are feeling tremendous financial pressures. Our centers report that many clients cannot afford the cost of the gas to travel to counseling sessions, and that many have serious mental health and substance abuse needs that go unmet due to cuts in funding, long waiting lists, or lack of health care coverage. They tell us that the current economic situation has caused a dramatic increase in stress levels and new clients, partially as a result of clients having insufficient funds to pay for therapy and other necessary services. In this difficult economic climate, victims of sexual assault cannot afford to lose a day's pay, and they certainly cannot risk losing their job altogether.

One of our member programs reported that victims themselves are not the only ones affected:

“Parents of child victims need to take time off from work as a result of their children’s victimization for medical, legal, or counseling appointments. These parents experience financial loss or disciplinary consequences at work...parents should not have to choose between bringing their child to counseling or going to court and losing pay, which in turn re-victimizes the child and punishes the entire family.”

In this recession more than ever, it is urgent that we give victims and their families the basic measure of economic security that comes from earning paid sick days.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding our position or services. Please feel free to contact me by email (ecafarella@connsacs.org) or by phone (860.282.9881).

Thank you for your consideration.